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ABSTRACT

While research has examined how age-related factors structure the probability of experiencing a particular event or suffering a particular kind of injury, one issue which has not been empirically addressed is the age structure of victimization from terrorist activity and civil strife. To explore the relationship between age and terrorist victimization, data on fatalities resulting from political violence were analyzed from Nothern Ireland (1965-1985), Spain (1975-1985), and Italy (1970-1981). The results revealed that all three countries shared an age-sex profile of victims that was disproportionately young and male. In all three countries the very young and the elderly were the least likely to be killed in civil strife and terrorist campaigns. Age was clearly related to how people become fatalities in each of the three countries, with the percentage of fatalities who were apparently innocent victims of violence increasing with age. The elderly who did become victims were not participants in violent activities nor were they specifically selected as targets but were most likely to be the innocent victims of indiscriminate violence. The rate of victimization of the elderly appeared to be low in countries where terrorist groups focused on combatants and somewhat higher in countries where terrorism was indiscriminate. (Author/NB)

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AGE AND TERRORIST VICTIMIZATION

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Paper presented at the 39th annual scientific meeting of The Gerontological Society of America, Chicago, Illinois November 19-23, 1986.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the age structure of terrorist victimization in three societies. Analysis of fatality data in Northern Ireland, Spain and Italy reveals that the very young and elderly are the least likely to be killed in civil strife and terrorist campaigns. The elderly who do become victims are not participants in violent activities nor are they specifically selected as targets but are most likely to be the innocent victims of indiscriminate violence.
Key words: terrorism, victimization, age.

AGE AND TERRORIST VICTIMIZATION

A concern common to much of the literature on aging and the life cycle focuses on the relationship between age and various life chances. In all of this research an attempt is made to determine how age related factors structure the probability of experiencing an event (such as poverty) or suffering an injury (such as criminal victimization). One issue which has not been empirically addressed is the age structure of victimization from terrorist activity and civil strife.

A growing body of literature on victimization not withstanding, there are several reasons for the absence of research on the age related dimensions of terrorism and civil violence. The United States has been relatively free of terrorist activity and, even in countries with active terrorist campaigns, only small numbers of people are effected. Terrorism, however, is increasing in the world and is expected to increase in the U.S. in coming years. Also, the killing of an aged American aboard a cruise ship underscores the fact that affluent older Americans are likely to travel and be exposed to risk or not travel for fear of becoming the victim of terrorist activity.

This paper addresses several hypotheses about the relationship between age and terrorist victimization. First, it is hypothesized that older people will be least likely to be the victims of terrorism; primarily because their life style patterns may remove them from the context of such activity and because only a few are likely to be perceived as combatants in civil conflicts. Alternatively, as people grow older they are more

likely to be in positions of institutional authority and symbols of existing social and political arrangements, and therefore they may be among those specifically targeted by terrorists.

MODELS OF AGE AND TERRORISM

Examination of the relationship between age and victimization inevitably leads to questions of life style and targeting: do the life styles of older people expose them to or protect them from risks of victimization; or is there some age related characteristic that causes the older person to be singled out for killing by terrorists? For example, the elderly in the U.S. are least likely to be the victim of criminal activity for most categories of crime, perhaps due to role related life styles and avoidence behavior motivated by fear. However, they are more likley to be selected as targets for purse and wallet snatching (1). In this case, age related physical characteristics clearly make the aged person a preferable target from the point of view of the criminal.

The examination of criminal activity requires recognition of many different types of crime, both violent and preditory. The analysis of terrorist victimization deals essentially with death and injury. Again, the potentially important mediating factor is selectivity or targeting. Terrorist attacks may be selective or indiscriminate and, if selective the aged may be more or less likely to be targeted. If attacks are indiscriminate, the life styles and patterns of daily activity of the aged may expose or protect them from death and injury.

An additional complicating factor is that terrorist

movements show considerable variation in both strategy and tactics. Campaigns waged by nationalist groups (such as the Irish Republican Army and Basque separatists in Northern Ireland and Spain respectively) identify the military and the police as their main targets. In Northern Ireland, for example, there were 15,146 incidents in which security forces were fired upon through the end of 1980 (2). Nationalists tend to perceive their territory as being occupied by foreigners and their strategy is to raise the cost of occupation leading to eventual withdrawl. Soldiers and police are symbols of foreign domination and are easy targets. Such an approach, at least in Western Societies, requires that terrorist groups minimize accidental deaths and not deliberately kill innocent non-combatants. Of course, the definition of combatant may be expanded to include young males or all members of opposing groups.

A second kind of terrorism is that of the political left. Here the police or military are not necessarly the main targets. Instead, these terrorists are more likely to attack businessmen, judges, politicians, and other representatives of the establishment. In Italy, the leftist terrorists are usually discriminating in their targets. One Italian official notes that: "Since the Red Brigades normally claim credit for their violent acts with special messages, the singling out of the victim and the personalization of the attack are very important for this group; it is based on its ability to select appropriate victims that the group measures its operational efficency and the psychological and political efficiency of its attacks" (3).

Finally, terrorism of the political right in Italy tends to

be more indiscriminate. By bombing public places and trains terrorists hope to raise social tensions and create demands for "law and order." A particularly notorious example of indiscriminate violence was the bombing of the Bologna train station in 1980.

The relationship between age and terrorist victimization, then, is conceptually complex. As with criminal victimization, the age related patterns of daily living may expose or protect people from being victimized. Alternatively, if older people are in positions of authority, they may be singled out as objects of terrorist activity. Also, the dominant mode of terrorism in any given country may be focused on those defined as enemies or it may be diffuse, without specific human targets. In either case, age may affect the risks of being the victim of terrorist violence.

METHOD

To test these hypotheses, we examine fatalities resulting from political violence in Northern Ireland (1965-1985), Spain (1975-1985) and Italy (1970-1981); countries that have suffered more deaths than other Western societies. Fatality data are taken from both official statistics and published chronologies.

The records kept by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) are the basic source for Northern Irish fatalities. These records generally give the name, age, address, where a person was killed and cause of death (i.e., gun shot wounds, explosion, etc.). The RUC records, however, usually do not provide information on the victim's religion, whether or not the victim was a member of a

terrorist organization, or by whom the person was killed. Thus, it is not possible to distinguish between, for example, people shot by the army or those assassinated by terrorists. Fortunately the files maintained by the Belfast office of the IRISH TIMES, while based upon the RUC files, provide additional information about the circumstances surrounding a death: the likely killer and the characteristics of the victim. The RUC/IRISH TIMES records begin October, 1971. For deaths prior to this date there are several sources. THE BELFAST NEWSLETTER (September 8, 1971) lists the first 100 deaths, giving name, age, address and a brief characterization of the cause of death. Deutsch and Magowan's chronology (4) records on a daily basis all the significant events that took place in Northern Ireland from 1968 through 1973. While rarely identifying fatalities by name, this chronology mentions about 90 percent. A typical entry may note that "a twenty year old girl was shot dead as she waited for a bus on the Crumlin Road when shots were fired at soldiers on patrol." McKeown (5) lists the first 500 deaths by name and classifies them into six categories; members of the security forces, terrorists, victims of terrorist activity, those shot by the security forces, assassinations and those killed during rioting. These and several additional sources are discussed in Hewett (2). For the purposes of this research a random sample of 1229 cases was drawn from the almost 3000 fatalities identified.

Sources for the Spanish data are Equipo Cinco (6), which lists victims from November 1975 to February 1977, Kessings, The London Times and The New York Times. For the period after January 1980, the U. S. Consulate in Bilboa provided information on

terrorist incidents based upon newspaper reports. A sample of 576 fatalities was identified from these sources.

For Italy, this study used data primarily from the Ministry of the Interior and the PCI (Sezione problemi dello Stato) and supplented these with other sources (2). The most detailed information is found in the annual and semi-annual reports put out by the PCI. These list those killed and wounded in terrorist attacks and give the name, victim characteristics, place of attack and group responsible. One might be suspicious of information provided by the PIC, but a comparison between the PIC data and that from other sources does not reveal any obvious bias or omissions. The Italian sample consisted of 360 fatalities.

These data are limited in several ways. First, the method of recording fatalities varies between countries and may vary over time within a country. Second, the data is based upon recorded deaths only, with no corresponding set of data on injury. There is, however, no reason to expect that the pattern of injuries would be different than the pattern of fatalities. Finally, age is not recored in all cases. For Northern Ireland, of 1229 cases we have age data for 1000 (81.4%); of 576 cases for Spain we have data for 416 (72.2%); of 360 cases for Italy we have data for 278 (77.2%). A comparison of cases with and without recorded age showed no differences with respect to other important variables such as sex and the circumstances of death.

FINDINGS

Age and Victimization

Table 1 shows that victims of terrorism and civil strife

tend to be relatively young men. This profile is apparent in Northern Ireland where the mean age of victims was 30 and only 8.5 percent were female. In Italy, the mean age of victims was 36 and fully one fourth were female. The mean age of victims was highest in Spain (38) but only 4 percent were female. Thus, while all three countries share an age-sex profile of victims that is disproportionately young and male, inter-country variation suggests differences in the nature and forms of terrorist movements.

(tables 1 and 2 about here)

Table 2 compares the age distribution of the populations for the three countries and the samples of fatalities, representing the expected and observed frequency of victimization respectively. For all countries, the difference between the expected and observed distributions is statistically significant. In each country, children and older people are least likely to become fatalities. Rather, victims tend to be late adolesents and young adults (ages 15-29). In Spain, individuals between the ages 30 and 49 also tend to be disproportionately represented among the victims. In Italy, very few children and many people aged 15-29 are killed, but after age 29 the expected and observed fatality rates are similar, with the elderly experiencing somewhat less than the expected fatalities but more than in Northern Ireland and Spain. The ratios of observed to expected fatalities in each age category are shown in Figure 1 and form an approximate inverted U shaped distribution.

(Figure 1 about here)

The lower than expected percentage of fatalities at the

beginning and ends of the life cycle and high fatality rates for the 15-29 year olds may be explained in several ways. First, to the degree that terrorist activity involves the targeting of perceived enemies and the very young and old are not defined as combatants, they will be outside the scope of terrorism. Differences in the degree of targeting or selection and in the definitions of combatant may also explain inter-country differences in the age distribution of fatalities. Second, the young and old may be protected by age status related life styles that reduce their exposure to random terrorist violence. Finally, the victims of terrorism may themselves be terrorists, thus comingling criminals who are likely to be young and other victims who may be older.

The Guilty and the Innocent

In Northern Ireland, terrorists killed by security forces or by their own bombs are listed among the fatalities. Of the 32 fatalities identified as terrorists (members of the Ulster Defense Association or the Ulster Volunteer Force), age was recorded for 29. These individuals ranged in age from 17 to 43, with the mean age being 27. Fully two thirds were under age 30. None of these fatalities was female. As with crime and war then, terrorism is the work of young men; useful comparisions given that terrorists often perceive themselves as soldiers but are defined as criminals.

By contrast the most clearly innocent victims of terrorism are those killed by bombings of public buildings or conveyances or by bombs detonated in crowded urban areas. These assults are

the purest form of terrrorism in that victims are neither targeted "enemies" nor participants in inter-group conflict. The more random and large scale these incidents, the greater their ability to inspire public fear and frustration. The bombing of the railroad station in Bologna, Italy in 1980, causing approximately 100 deaths, is one of the best known examples of this form of terrorism.

The random nature of this terrorist incident is highlighted by the large number of women and children killed. Women were 42 percent of the fatalities compared with only 15 percent for the rest of the Italian sample of victims. Seven percent were children under age 15 compared with only 1 percent for the rest of the Italian sample. Table 3 shows the age distribution of fatalities from the Balogna bombing compared with the age distribution of the Italian population and the remainder of the Italian sample. Examination of the expected (population) and observed (Bologna) fatality rates shows that the very young and old were under represented among the dead. All other age groups had higher than expected death rates with the difference between the expected and observed rates greatest for the 15 to 29 year olds. The large number of fatalities in this group appears to be related to the role of student -- fully 20 percent of those killed were students.

(table 3 about here)

Age and How Killed

Fatalities are recorded in such a way as to allow judgements about the circumstances of death. For our purposes we

want to distinguish between those who are the innocent victims of random terrrorist violence and those who are targeted (assassinated) by terrorists. We also want to identify those who are participants in civil strife and terrorism and who have been killed by security forces or by their own bombs.

Table 4 shows how the fatalities in each of the age groups were killed. Children under age 15 are omitted from this analysis because of the small number of fatalities in this category. Individuals killed in civil strife or terrorist incidents who are defined as innocent are those caught in riots or in shootings between terrorists and police, or those killed in clearly indiscriminate bombings. Assassination, implies selection -- the individual killed is defined as a combatant by terrorists and targeted as a victim. Finally, some of the fatalities were participants in riots (though not necessarly terrorists) or were terrorists killed by their own bombs or in shootouts with police. The data for Spain did not allow us to differentate this last category of victim.

Age is clearly related to how people become fatalities in each of the three countries. The percentage of fatalities who are apparently innocent victims of violence increases with age. In Northern Ireland, only 18 percent of the 15-29 year old fatalities were innocent compared with fully 47 of the elderly fatalities. For Spain the pattern is less clear, but aged fatalities again were most likely to be innocent victims of random violence. Finally, Italy had the highest portion of innocent victims at all ages, ranging from 38 percent for the 15-29 year old group to fully 90 percent for the elderly.

Conversely, fatalities in the 15-29 year old group are most likely to be participants in Northern Ireland and Italy while few of the aged fatalities are the result of participation.

(table 4 about here)

The pattern of assassinations suggests that people targeted are somewhat older. For each of the three countries, fatalities in the 30-49 and 50-64 year old groups are more likely to have been assassinated than in the younger and older groups.

DISCUSSION

Age is clearly related to the risk of becomming a victim of terrorism or civil violence and to the circumstances of death for those killed. In Northern Ireland, Italy and Spain, the relationship between age and terrorist victimization is somewhat similar: children and the elderly are less likely to die as the result of terrorist activity than individuals of other ages. The inverted U pattern of victimization resembles that of homicide in the United States or casualities from war in general. Adolescents and young adults, primarily men, are the most likely to be killed. There appear to be two reasons for the low fatality rates among children and elderly. First, they appear to be protected by the life style patterns associated with childhood and retirement roles. They probably remain closer to home than other ages and are not likely to be in public places where confrontations between rioters or terrorists and security forces take place. Similarly, they are less likely to frequent railroad stations, airline terminals and other places where terrorists plant bombs. Second, older people are not participants in the confrontation

between terrorist movements and security forces, nor are they defined as combatants and targeted for killing because they are enemies.

There is some support for the hypothesis that with age and higher occupational status in governmental and business establishments people are more likely to be targeted by terrorists. For fatalities age 30 to 64, the percentage of those killed by assassination increases. However, because the elderly are likely to be retired, this does not extend to the over 65 year old group.

Although the age structure of victimization is similar in these three countries, there are also important inter-country differences. In Northern Ireland and Spain, the terrorist campaigns are waged by nationalist groups (IRA and Basque separatists) and violence tends to be directed toward perceived combatants such as security forces. This implies that the conflict there is somewhat like war with emphasis on targeting soldiers or young males of the opposing side. In Northern Ireland, at any age, only a minority of fatalities appear to result from random violence -- although this is highest among the elderly. Fatalities are younger than in other societies and assassination appears to be a dominant terrorist strategy. Only a small number of older people are participants and few are seen as combatants and assassinated.

In Spain, although fatalities tend to be older, assassination again is the dominant method of killing and few people of any age are killed by indiscriminate bombings and random violence. Even a majority of the elderly fatalities are

assassinated.

In Italy, on the other hand, assassination is less frequent and, except for the late adolescent-young adult group, the majority of fatalities in each age category tend to be the result of random violence. Indeed, the risk for the elderly is greatest in Italy in several ways. First, after young adulthood, the distribution of fatalities is similar to that of the population and the observed frequency of fatalities among the aged is only slightly smaller than the expected frequency. The reason for this appears to be that in Italy there are terrorist movements of both the left and right. The latter in particular employ more diffuse forms of violance and the old therfore are not protected by their detachment from the conflict.

Our analysis demonstrates that age partially accounts for the risk of terrorist victimization. The data, however, are only for fatalities; leaving the related questions of injury, fear and avoidence behavior unanswered. Although we would reasonably expect the pattern of personal injury from terrorism and civil violence to parallel that for our fatality data, we cannot assess levels of fear in these European societies. With regard to the United States, however, the apparent widespread avoidence of European and Middle Eastern destinations suggests that fear is probably most keenly felt by potential travelers.

In summary, the young and elderly are not likely to become the victims of terrorist violence. Perhaps because older people are retired, they are neither perceived as combatants in civil strife nor likely to be in the kinds of public places where they

will be exposed to random terrorist activity. For these reasons, the rate of victimization of the elderly is low in countries where terrorist groups focus on combatants but somewhat higher in countries where terrorism is indiscriminate.

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Table 1

AGE AND SEX OF FATALITIES

		Northern Ireland (n=1000)	Spain (n=416)	Italy (n=278)
Sex	male	91.5 %	95.9 %	75.5 %
	female	8.5	4.1	24.5
Age	mean	30.27	37.55	35.81
	S. D.	14.88	14.50	17.43

Table 2

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND FATALITIES

	AGE						
	<14	15-29	30-49	50-64	65+	%	no*
NORTHERN IRELAND+							
population	28.13	23.46	22.46	14.66	11.28	99.99	15373
sample	3.40	57.20	27.40	8.80	3.20	100.00	1000
ratio	0.12	2.44	1.22	0.60	0.28		
SPAIN**							
population	25.64	23.24	24.17	15.64	11.31	100.00	37680
sample	2.16	33.17	40.87	20.43	3.37	100.00	416
ratio	0.08	1.43	1.69	1.31	0.30		
ITALY**							
population	26.42	21.64	25.70	15.90	10.35	100.00	58831
sample	3.24	43.53	28.42	17.27	7.55	100.00	278
ratio	0.12	2.01	1.11	1.09	0.73		

*population in thousands
+Census of Northern Ireland 1961
**1981 UN DEMOGRAPHIC YEAR BOOK
Note: chi-square p <.001 for all population and sample distributions.

Table 3

DISTRIBUTION OF FTALITIES FOR THE BOLOGNA BOMBING

	AGE						
	<14	15-29	30-49	50-64	65+	%	nc*
Population	26.42	21.64	25.70	15.90	10.35	100.00	58831
Bologna	7.29	36.46	31.25	19.79	5.21	100.00	96
other	1.10	47.25	26.92	15.93	8.79	100.00	182

*population of Italy in thousands.
Note: chi-square for population and Bologna distributions is p <.001.
Chi-square for Bologna and "other" distributions is p <.05.

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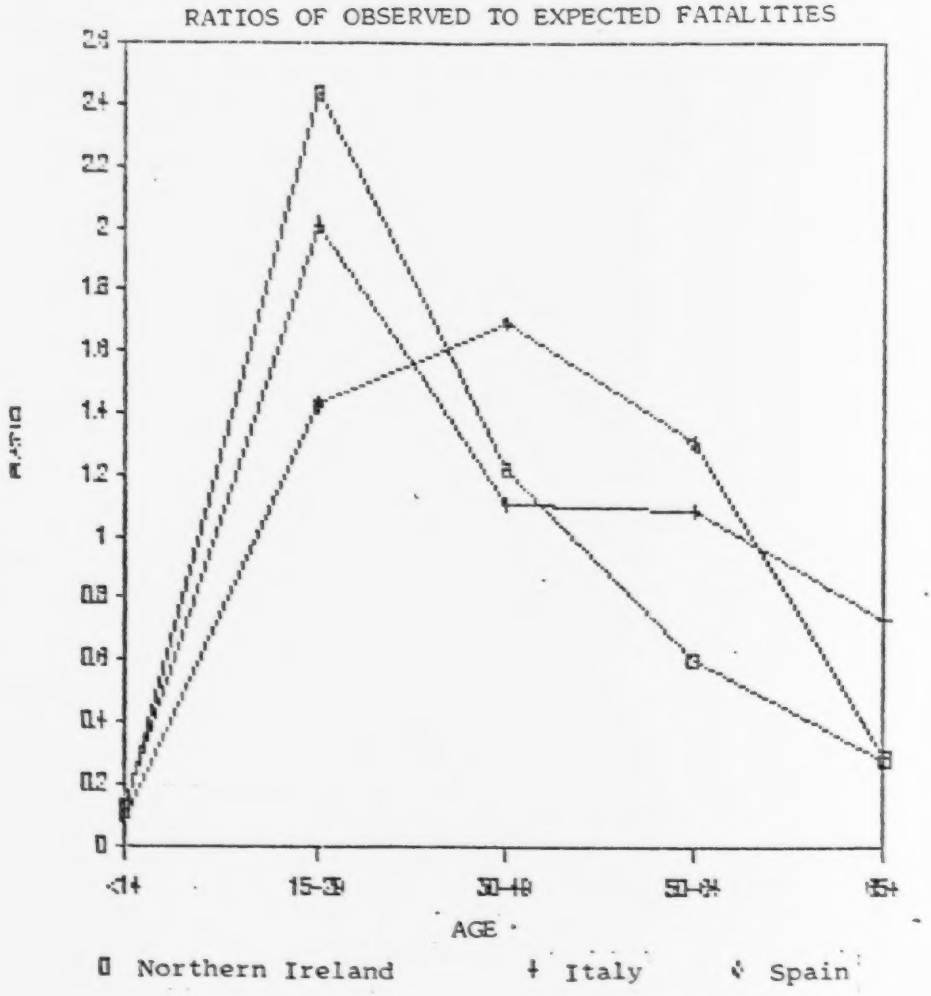
TABLE 4

AGE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

	AGE*			
	15-29	30-49	50-64	65+
NORTHERN IRELAND				
innocent	18.0	24.4	32.9	46.7
assassinated	41.5	55.0	51.8	43.3
participant	40.5	20.6	15.3	10.0
percent	100.1	99.9	100.0	100.0
n=941	555	271	85	30
chi-square p <.001				
SPAIN				
innocent	27.0	11.6	9.6	38.5
assassinated	73.0	88.4	90.4	61.5
percent	100	100	100	100
n=401	141	164	83	13
chi-square p <.001				
ITALY				
innocent	38.0	51.3	68.8	90.5
assassinated	20.9	31.6	29.2	9.5
participant	41.1	17.1	2.1	0.0
percent	100	100	100	100
n=274	129	76	48	21
chi-square p <.001				

* The <15 category is omitted due to the small number of cases.

Figure 1


RATIOS OF OBSERVED TO EXPECTED FATALITIES
2.2
2
1.8
1.6
1.4
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1
0.8
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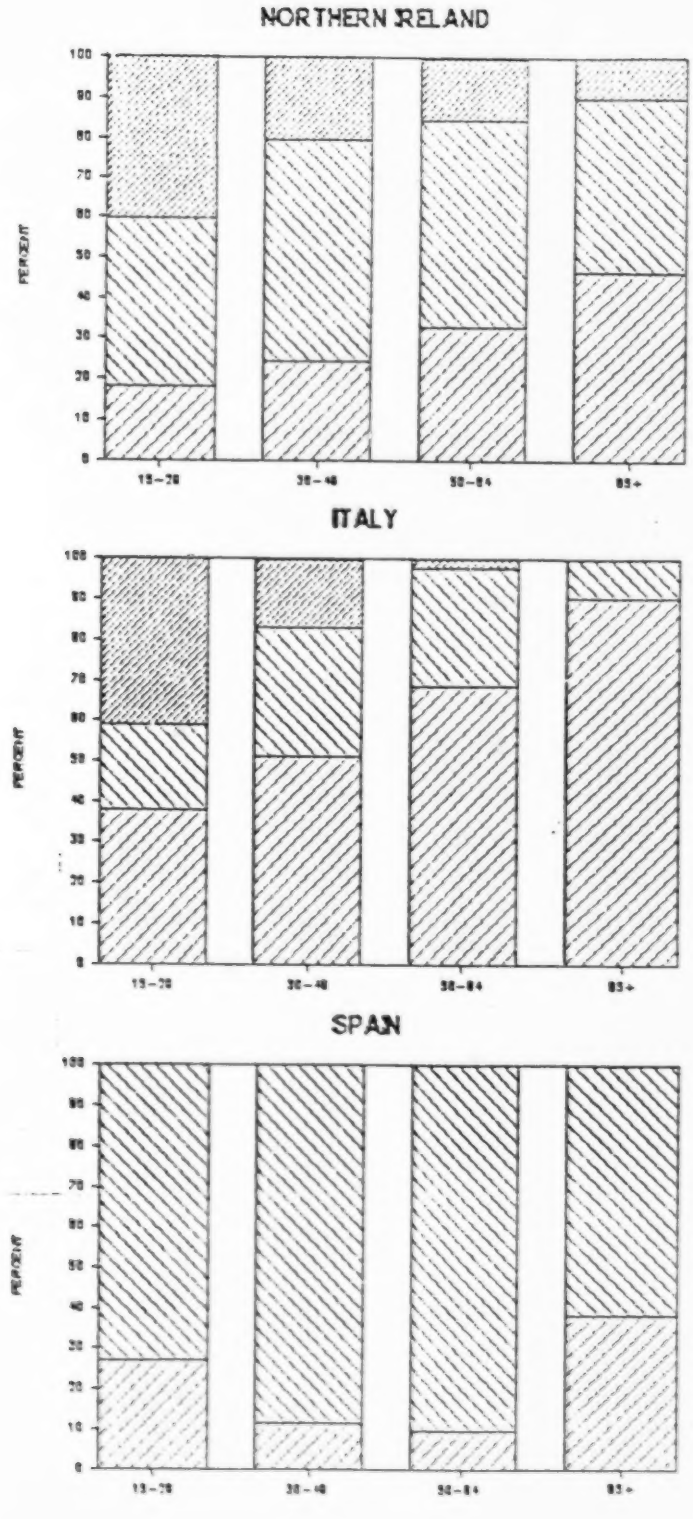
0
<14
15-39
40-49
50-64
65+
AGE
Northern Ireland
Italy
Spain

Figure 2

AND HOW KILLED



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